



Volume 4, Issue 6

Gray Davis, Governor
Maria Contreras-Sweet, Secretary of Business, Transportation and Housing Agency
Jeff Morales, Director

MAY, 2003

Worker Memorial Draws 700 to Capitol Park; 'Safety' the Word of the Day



Caltrans maintenance workers Shelly Piscitelli (from left), Joe Simas and Paul Inman were part of the honor guard paying tribute to the 158 department employees who have lost their lives in the line of duty.

As part of the National Highway Work Zone Safety Week, more than 700 Caltrans employees and friends observed the department's third annual Highway Worker Memorial Service April 8 on the east side of the State Capitol.

The focus of the event was on 158 orange safety cones, arranged in the outline of a

"caution" sign to remind employees and the public that highway work can be both dangerous and deadly. Each cone bore the name of a Caltrans employee killed in the line of duty over the last 79 years.

"These are not just abstract numbers, or simply names affixed to a memorial plaque," said BT&H Secretary Maria

Contreras-Sweet. "They are fellow workers – real men and women, friends and members of the Caltrans family – who died performing the dangerous work of building, operating and maintaining our highway system.

"We ride our highways more safely and with more confidence because these workers bravely go about their jobs," she said.

Thousands of other employees throughout the state were asked to take a moment for silent reflection during the 11 a.m. ceremony.

"As we look at the names on the cones, we are reminded of how life can take sharp and unexpected turns," said Director Jeff Morales, one of several speakers at the memorial.

"All of us work continually to improve our work and renew our commitment to safety. We embrace the possibility of a California Department of Transportation in which there are no deaths to commemorate," the director said.

The orange cones had dual meaning. They recalled the fallen, but they also pointed toward the future, the director said. Although the department has completed a great deal of work in the last two years,

Memorial Service

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Caltrans Crews Answer Call in Absence of National Guard

Caltrans personnel have been called to active duty to help protect the state in the event of a natural disaster while members of the California National Guard are supporting American military forces in the Middle East.

"While the Guard units are supporting our troops overseas, our personnel will be ready to respond when called upon to do whatever we can to protect people and property if fires, floods or other natural disasters strike our state," said Larry Orcutt, Chief of Caltrans' Maintenance Division.

Although the department's primary responsibility will remain the state's transportation system, in the event of an emergency, the department's maintenance workers and engineers may be ordered to the front lines to assist the Office of Emergency Services (OES) and local emergency responders in dealing with natural disasters.

"We help whenever and wherever we can. We'll be there when it counts," said John Cottier, Chief of the Division

of Maintenance's Equipment and Operations Office.

Caltrans is part of the OES response team and one of the state's primary responders once the Governor declares a state of emergency. With the call up of various National Guard units to active duty overseas, Caltrans has been put on notice that its employees, primarily equipment

National Guard

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DIRECTOR'S CORNER



Director Jeff Morales

Safety Remains Job Number One for Caltrans

roads. More people are spending more time doing more things on our system than ever before. Yet, at the same time, not a single Caltrans employee has died in a work-zone accident.

That is the best tribute we could offer to the 158 people we have honored. And it is the kind of safety record that we are trying to make into a permanent Caltrans tradition.

Although the memorial service took on a somber tone, it also voiced our hope and our gratitude, because the department has now gone two years without any deaths on the job. In fact, total vehicle collisions in high work zones have dropped by about 25 over the last two years.

During the Sacramento observance, we also took a moment to note the oak tree that employees planted last year – now growing vigorously just a few steps from the Capitol, where many Caltrans employees can see it during lunch hour walks.

We noted that the oak is a living memorial to our fallen workers. Its steady growth helps to reflect the progress we are making in the safety field. And it reminds us of just how important it is that each one of us goes home safely each evening.

Part of that success can be attributed to an increased sense of safety throughout the department. We're using more reflective clothing and vehicles, and coming up with more safety equipment. So the message to our employees is coming through clearly: In order to work safely along our highway system, we need to be vigilant.

However, another important factor in our safety record can be credited to the "Slow for the Cone Zone" advertising campaign that began last year. Billboards and radio "spots" reminded drivers

to slow down and watch for highway workers when they enter maintenance and construction zones.

Previously, the campaign had been limited to urban areas in Northern California and along the Central Coast. But now we are taking our \$5 million campaign statewide in hopes that virtually every driver in the state will have an opportunity to hear the message.

In concert with the previous campaigns, we also surveyed motorists to see how well they understood and remembered the message. The results tell us that the message is getting through. So, we are going to build on our successes and try to reinforce the message even more.

The point should be clear. This year, as with memorials in past seasons, we pause to honor our fallen workers. By putting their names on the 158 cones, we pass the word of caution to all those who will listen.

And in their name, we need to speak clearly to those who are impaired by drugs or alcohol or lack of sleep. Through campaigns such as "Slow for the Cone Zone," we must get the attention of wandering minds, which through mere inattention, simply forgot to slow down in work zones.

We must spread the word from one Caltrans employee to another – to watch for those who are at the greatest risk.

And above all, we need to remember that safety is not a matter of chance. Safety is a way of life at Caltrans. In our own ways, we honor the 158 souls by always remembering to return safely each day.



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Public Affairs Office
1120 N Street, Room 1200
Mail Stop 49
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 654-4020
(916) 653-4086 (TTY) or CRS - 711



National Guard*cont. from page 1*

operators, would be enlisted to assist where needed off the state transportation system.

"Our people are highly trained and they are battle tested. They know how to respond in difficult situations," said Cottier, who is responsible for overseeing the department's statewide disaster response.

Responding to disasters is nothing new for Caltrans. In fact, Caltrans personnel have been in the forefront of responding to every major natural disaster to strike the Golden State for more than 20 years, including the 1989 Loma Prieta and 1994 Northridge earthquakes, the 1991 Oakland fire and the devastating 1996 Northern California floods.

"Once the disaster is declared, we are ready to swing into action. The resources are identified and the directions go out to our people," said Cottier.

While the National Guard is overseas, Caltrans' response could include backhoes, loaders, water trucks and more than 2,100 operators to run them. In addition, Caltrans engineers could be called into service to inspect public facilities for damage.

Such was the case in the 1991 Oakland Hills fire when Caltrans equipment operators drove eight water trucks through the inferno in an attempt to help save homes and people threatened by the blaze. (See following story.)

"You see the devastation and people are losing everything. You want to do what you can to help. It's personal. If the tables were reversed, you would hope people would do the same for you," said Larry McPeak, District 4 East Bay Maintenance Supervisor.

The examples go on and on, according to Cottier. "Every part of the state has been touched by disaster and, in each case, the Caltrans crews were there ready to assist. The local crews are the first ones to respond. If needed, we dispatch crews from other areas of the state to assist. It is a team effort. For example, in the Oakland fire, water tankers and operators from Sacramento were sent to the Oakland hills," he said.

Caltrans District 10 crews in 1997 operated a fleet of bulldozers to help erect a levee

adjacent to Interstate 5, which successfully redirected floodwaters around the community of Mossdale in southern San Joaquin County.

In 1997, a devastating fire in the Sierras burned right to the back door of the Caltrans maintenance yard at Woodfords near the town of Markleeville in Alpine County. Caltrans maintenance personnel joined firefighters to save the maintenance yard and then helped cut firebreaks that



Senior Bridge Engineer Richard Hunt was among the Caltrans team called upon to check out the structural integrity of the Folsom Dam during the 1995 storms that struck the greater Sacramento area.

held the line and spared the town of Markleeville.

Neil Nyswonger, maintenance supervisor at Woodfords, said disasters are no time to think of jurisdictions. "You do what you have to do," he said.

Last December during a severe snowstorm, Nyswonger's crew heard on the emergency radio that an ambulance dispatched to a private home to aid a victim of asphyxiation was trapped by heavy snows.

"We sent a plow over immediately and dug the ambulance out. The person was taken to the hospital and is now doing fine," Nyswonger said.

Maintenance is not alone in responding.

In 1995, one of the floodgates on the Folsom Dam failed and the Army Corps of Engineers and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation were worried that the dam could fail, flooding a wide swath of Sacramento County. Even so, about 40 percent of the water in Folsom Lake was drained through the damaged gate.

The two agencies wanted use of a Caltrans snooper truck to examine the dam and the damaged gate.

"When they told us what they wanted, we knew the snooper wouldn't work, but the job was perfect for our climbing team," recalled Richard Hunt, Senior Bridge Engineer in the Office of Structure Maintenance.

A team of Caltrans engineers was lowered via ropes down the face of the dam to inspect all eight of the dam's floodgates, including the one that failed.

In all, ten Caltrans bridge engineers, two chemists and three structural steel inspectors were on site for more than two months inspecting the facility and assisting with the repairs. The department's underwater inspection team located the broken gate parts and a State Parks and Recreation boat that were submerged at the bottom of the spillway.

Engineers and technicians from the Translab conducted a forensic examination to determine why the floodgate failed and developed bolt specifications for the new gate and recommendations for retrofitting the remaining gates. Translab

provided engineers to install strain gauges on some of the remaining gates to determine the stresses involved. The Translab also did the paint analyses while Mechanical Engineer Rich Newell inspected and provided grease specifications for the trunions that raise and lower the gates.

"A dam is like a sideways bridge. The loads on a dam are horizontal instead of vertical. It performs in many ways like a moveable truss bridge with which Caltrans engineers are very familiar," Hunt explained.

As a result of the Caltrans work, all the bolts on the gates were replaced, the lubrication material for the trunions changed and the Caltrans specification adopted to paint the steel members.

Cottier said the department crews have mixed feelings about filling in for the National Guard. "We want to help and we are prepared to assist where we can. However, this is one call you would prefer not receiving because it means a disaster has happened. That's never good news. If it comes, we'll be ready," Cottier said. "The public can count on us."

Caltrans has nine employees on active duty with the military in the Middle East.

Disaster Experience Steels Resolve of Caltrans Responders

Nearly 12 years have passed, but even now in the quiet of a spring evening, Peter Terry can close his eyes and hear the crackling of burning trees and see the billowing plumes of black, acrid smoke.

"Disasters like the Oakland Hills fire are something you never forget," said Peter Terry, District 4 Maintenance Supervisor at the Telegraph Yard in Oakland and a veteran of the 1991 Oakland Hills fire.

So it is for Terry and his maintenance colleagues, including his brother Mike and Larry Cooper. All have the devastation of that terrible fire on a late October Sunday seared on their memories.

The Oakland Hills fire left a path of destruction including 25 deaths, 150 injuries, 3,000 homes lost and more than \$2 billion in property damage.

Peter Terry was one of 150 Caltrans workers who responded to the fire. He was involved in evacuating residents from the Parkwood Apartments near the Caldecott Tunnel, narrowly escaping death and being hospitalized for smoke inhalation and injuries suffered in the fire.

Responding to disasters and putting their lives on the line is nothing new for Peter Terry and his maintenance colleagues.

Cooper, Landscape Supervisor at District 4's San Leandro maintenance station, has been involved in every major disaster to strike the Bay Area since the early 1980s including the Loma Prieta earthquake, the tanker that blew up in the Caldecott Tunnel and the Medfly. He narrowly escaped death in the Oakland Hills fire.

Cooper and Mike Terry were finishing up clearing brush on the hills above Caldecott's No. 1 bore when the Oakland Hills erupted into a raging inferno.

The pair headed back to the yard when they made a fateful and fortunate decision to swing by the nearby Parkwood Apartments.

"We were nosy," Cooper recalled. "We thought we would just go over there and get a better look at the fire. We made it to the apartment complex and the fire just erupted. Before we knew it, we were caught in the middle of it," Cooper said.

Cooper and Terry took it upon themselves to begin moving people out.

As Cooper directed traffic, Mike Terry and a firefighter used Terry's truck to drive through the complex using the vehicle's PA system to tell people to evacuate immediately.

Cooper and Mike Terry picked up numerous people and their pets narrowly ahead of the advancing flames. As the Parkwood Apartments burned to the ground, the Caltrans pair and their valuable cargo drove through the fire to Highway 13 and safety.

"The Oakland fire was dramatic but it really isn't much different from situations we face every day," said Mike Terry, who is the maintenance superintendent at District 4's Walnut Creek maintenance station. "We face life and death situations routinely. You have accidents or spills and people are counting on you. That's the time when you rely on your training and the natural adrenaline to pull you through."

"It's only afterwards that you scratch your head and say to yourself 'what was I thinking'." Terry said.

A made-for-TV movie about the Oakland fire included actual footage of Mike Terry's truck in the parking lot of the Parkwood Apartments with the fire in full flight.

"I look at that now and my legs cramp up, my stomach is tied in knots and my heart pumps very fast," he said.

A parade of Caltrans employees from the Bay Area and the adjoining District 3 centered in Sacramento operated water tankers through the Oakland Hills over the four days of the fire, saving countless homes.

"You don't really think of the danger at the

time. You just do what you have to do," said Larry McPeak, District 4 East Bay Maintenance Supervisor.

"Disasters are so unpredictable," McPeak said. "What you can depend on are the training and experience of our people who are called on to respond and the trust they have in each other," said McPeak. "They know what to do. It is that way in District 4 and across the state."



Oakland fire veterans (from left) Larry Cooper, Peter Terry and Michael Terry will be ready to respond again if a disaster strikes. The three District 4 maintenance employees were involved in responding to the devastating 1991 blaze that scorched the Oakland Hills.



War's Impact Extends to Caltrans Engineer in Central Valley

As Abdul Baker, District 6 senior transportation engineer, watched the first pictures of American forces rolling into Baghdad in April, he was filled with happiness and anxiety.

The Iraqi-born Caltrans engineer was happy that his birthplace was being freed from the clutches of a brutal dictatorship but anxious about the safety of the American forces and his four sisters and their families who live in Iraq.

"The feelings were definitely mixed," said Baker, who was born in Baghdad 42 years ago and lived there until 1980 when he left to attend college at the University of Nebraska, Omaha.

"I am happy that someone finally decided to get rid of this tyrant who has been terrorizing Iraqis for so long. Unless you've lived under Saddam's dictatorship, it is hard to comprehend the evil of this man and his regime," Baker explained. "At the same time, I am anxious about the fate of my family, the many innocent Iraqi civilians and the sacrifice that the American troops and their families are making for Iraq."

When the war started in March, Baker was able to keep in touch by telephone with his four sisters. Three live in Baghdad and the other one in Hillah, a town 60 miles southeast of Baghdad and site of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

On March 28, phone service stopped and so did Baker's communications with his four sisters in Iraq. His mother and a fifth sister, and three brothers who are not able to return to Iraq unless Saddam is removed from power, pray that soon they will be able to communicate with their sisters.

"We have not heard from them but we remain hopeful that they are safe," said Baker.

Baker's family knows firsthand the senseless brutality of Saddam Hussein's regime. In 1980 during the early stages of the Iraq-Iran war, one of Baker's brothers-in-law decided to stop in a coffee shop on his way home from work. While at the shop, he saw a television report about the progress of the war. The commentator announced that 1,000 Iranian troops had been killed in fighting that day compared to 10 Iraqis. Baker's brother-in-law reacted and said, "Multiply that number by ten."

"He made a comment that the true Iraqi casualty number should be multiplied by ten. He never made it home and we have never heard from him again," Baker explained.



District 6 Senior Transportation Engineer Abdul Baker is anxiously awaiting word about the fate of his four sisters and their families in Iraq.

Such brutal atrocities are example of Saddam's madness. When Baker's sister approached the authorities about the whereabouts of her husband. "They told her, 'don't ever come by and ask,'" he said.

Baker recalled that even Iraqi children at a young age were exposed to the terror the regime instilled in the populace. "If anyone said anything against Saddam or the government, Saddam's people would grab the person, cut his tongue out in front of everyone and then let them bleed to death in the street," he said. "They demonstrated what you could say and more importantly what you could not say."

Baker tried over the years to convince his family members to leave. Some did, like his mother and his brother who moved to Austria.

"Leaving has never really been an option for my sisters in Iraq. They are married with families and while they could have left, their families would not have been permitted to leave. There was no way my sisters would leave their families. They along with most Iraqis waited for the day when Saddam would be gone," he said.

Baker has not been back to Iraq since he left in 1980. "Because I had left to go to school and did not serve in the Army, I would have been treated as a deserter and as soon as I returned would have been taken to jail and hung," he explained. "And there

is no appeal." As a result over the past 20 years, Baker has visited with his family members in a variety of locales including Turkey, Syria and Jordan, but never Iraq.

For Baker, who lives in Fresno with his wife (Emma) and two daughters Hanan age 7 and Nusaiba age 9, voicing his opinion now about the events in Iraq is something he never would have considered even two months ago.

"Just making a public statement, even here in America, would have sealed a death sentence for my family back in Iraq and possibly for me and my family here," Baker explained. "Anyone who spoke out against Saddam

or his regime either in Iraq or abroad would pay the price," said Baker. "That is why you can see so many Iraqis being very wary and tentative about speaking out or showing their happiness to the American troops until they are sure Saddam is gone."

While the war has been underway, Baker has monitored events in Iraq but has focused his efforts on his job in project development in District 6 where he has worked since 1990 on a number of high profile Central Valley projects like the Highway 99/132 interchange, the Highway 108/120 Oakdale Rehab and the widening of Highway 216 in Visalia.

After earning his engineering degree, Baker landed a job in the construction industry in Fresno before going to work for Fresno County and ultimately Caltrans in 1990.

Baker hopes for a bright future for an Iraq free from Saddam Hussein.

"Americans tend to take the freedoms we have for granted. When you live under a tyrant, you have a better appreciation for freedom and all it offers," he said. "My hope is that America stays engaged and helps Iraq rebuild."

As for his own immediate plans, Baker is hoping to visit Iraq and his family as soon as possible. "Hopefully this summer," he said.

Caltrans Family Artwork Graces Safety Contest

by Jane Sellers, District 6 Research Writer

"My drawing was a freeway with some construction vehicles. It was used for May," said eight-year-old Mark Bretz, who drew a picture of roads, bridges and heavy construction equipment, set off by the words "Be Safe! (Work Safely)"

He's referring to his page in a colorful 18-month 2003-2004 calendar that features the artwork of 17 children – mostly family members or relatives of Caltrans employees – who were winners of the "Slow for the Cone Zone" Safety Calendar Contest, sponsored by the Caltrans District 6 Maintenance and Operations office.

The contest, held last fall, was open to children under the age of 12 who are family members or relatives of District 6 employees in any division of Caltrans. Schoolchildren from Miramonte Elementary School in the Pinehurst area also participated. Their sponsor was Rick McComb, Caltrans Pinehurst Maintenance Station Supervisor, who volunteers at the school.

Eighteen pieces of artwork were selected to illustrate the calendar, which covers March 2003 to August 2004.

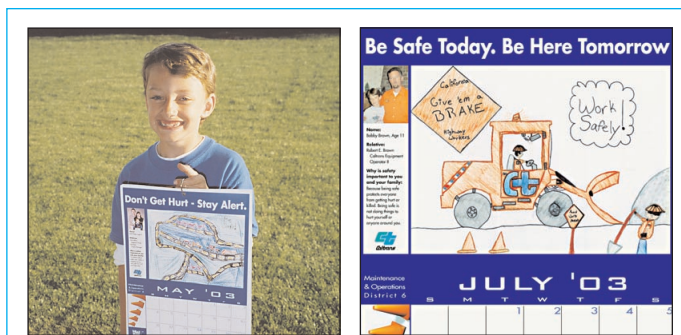
"The goal of the contest was to promote safety awareness throughout District 6 and to emphasize the importance of safety within our work zones. This project was made possible through Headquarters Maintenance under the Slow for the Cone Zone campaign," said Assistant Caltrans Administrator Monica Young, who was the contest coordinator in District 6. "And the artwork submitted was fabulous, very creative, and a lot of fun to put together."

Kevin Kast, a Caltrans graphic designer, created the calendar format and prepared the graphics. Thom Stockwell, who works in Reprographics, printed the calendars.

"The children seem to have a good grasp of the importance of safe driving and

how it affects not only the motoring public but the Caltrans workers along the highways as well. The artwork along with the children's safety slogans approach safety in a very simple and straightforward manner, which works very well in getting the safety message out," said Kast, who spent a couple weeks designing the calendar once the children's artwork had been selected.

District 6 Deputy District Director of Maintenance and Operations Malcolm X.



Eight-year-old Mark Bretz shows off his page (May 2003) of the 18-month Safety Calendar, put out by the District 6 Maintenance and Operations office. Each month of the calendar is intended to underscore the importance of safety in Caltrans' daily operations.

Dougherty appreciated the work that went into the project. "I am absolutely thrilled with the outcome. Kevin Kast and Monica Young did an outstanding job putting it together. The artwork by the kids was great!" said Dougherty. "HQ Maintenance initiated the project and encouraged each district to participate. Herby Lissade, Acting Deputy District Director at the time, thought it was appropriate to involve all functional units to truly make it a District 6 calendar. Several other districts have also developed calendars, and HQ combined submittals from all the districts and developed a statewide calendar."

The message of the calendar is clear. "The calendar is intended to remind us that safety is important to more than just ourselves, most notably our families. We hope that it serves as a reminder to all of us that it is worth undertaking every task at work safely," said Dougherty, whose own son, Connor, has artwork in the calendar.

Artwork created by the following children won a spot in the calendar:

- **KOREY T. ANDERSON**, son of Kirk Anderson, Transportation Engineer
- **TAYLOR HOWELL**, daughter of Eric Woods, Visalia Maintenance Area Superintendent
- **MARK BRETZ**, son of Jane Sellers, Central Region Research Writer, and Neil Bretz, Central Region Project Manager
- **PHILIP WOODS**, son of Eric Woods, Visalia Maintenance Area Superintendent
- **BOBBY BROWN**, son of Robert E. Brown, Caltrans Equipment Operator II
- **HALLIE HOOD**, daughter of Roland Hood, Caltrans Equipment Operator II
- **RAWAN SULTAN**, daughter of Mah-Mood Sultan, Transportation Engineer – Civil, and Razan Sultan, Transportation Engineer – Electrical
- **R J POLYACK**, son of Robert Polyack, Transportation Engineer
- **SETH HILL**, son of Alan Hill, Transportation Engineer Technician (two of Seth's drawings were selected)
- **CONNOR DOUGHERTY**, son of Malcolm X. Dougherty, Deputy District Director, Maintenance and Operations
- **SHELBY WATSON**, whose school mentor was Rick McComb, Pinehurst Maintenance Supervisor
- **WREN MYERS-MASON**, granddaughter of Steve Mason, South Region, Maintenance Manager I
- **LISA ORSBUN**, whose school mentor was Rick McComb, Pinehurst Maintenance Supervisor
- **RUBY SULTAN**, daughter of Mah-Mood Sultan, Transportation Engineer – Civil, and Razan Sultan, Transportation Engineer – Electrical
- **CHRIS DENNEY**, whose school mentor was Rick McComb, Pinehurst Maintenance Supervisor
- **JOSEPH HUNTER**, whose school mentor was Rick McComb, Pinehurst Maintenance Supervisor
- **JOCelyn CANTU**, daughter of Jess Cantu, Mendota Leadworker, North Region Maintenance

A limited number of calendars was printed. The calendars were distributed to District 6 employees in March.

Planning Office Focuses on Community-Sensitive Approaches

Caltrans' Office of Community Planning (OCP) within the Division of Transportation Planning was fully staffed in the Spring of 2000 to address a statewide need for community-sensitive approaches to transportation decision-making and to promote and participate in community-based planning that integrates land use, transportation and community values.

The office, under the direction of Tom Neumann, Chief, Office of Community Planning, has three primary functions:

- The Intergovernmental Review/California Environmental Quality Act (IGR/CEQA) function is essential to Caltrans' stewardship of the state transportation system. It allows the department to review, comment and recommend mitigation measures on local plans, programs and development proposals that have potential impacts on the state transportation system. The aim of this function is to include transportation considerations in land use decisions.
- The Community-Based Transportation Planning (CBTP) function is a new departmental initiative with a focus on better integrating land use activities and decisions with transportation planning. This emphasizes community values into Caltrans' mainstream planning activities. The CBTP function serves as a resource center for the department on the subject of smart growth and livable communities. A (CBTP) grant

program has also been established to provide incentive funding for selected projects that promote the concept of community planning that integrates land use, transportation and community values.

- The Public Participation function is an enhanced support service for all planning within the department. This effort allows the development of transportation projects that enjoy public support and are easier to develop and deliver because of consistency with community values.

The first Community Planning conference presented by the Office of Community Planning for Caltrans staff was held last November. The conference theme was the challenges and successes of Community Planning and what our goals are for the future. The conference was successful in providing district and headquarters functions the opportunity to share the challenges and successes that they have experienced in carrying out their community planning and public participation activities and to provide a forum to discuss and develop strategies and solutions to resolve issues that can be implemented on a statewide basis.

For additional information about the office and its functions, check out the following web page:

<http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/tpp/offices/ocp/ocp.htm>

District 4 Ushers In New Year With Arrival of Spring

by Andre Schokrpur, Supervising Transportation Engineer

The arrival of spring in District 4 was cause to celebrate – New Year's.

That's right – a new year.

The start of spring also means Iranian New Year and, thanks to the district's employees of Iranian heritage, a new year's celebration has become an annual spring rite in Caltrans' Bay Area-based district.

There are more than 200 employees of Iranian heritage in the district.

On Tuesday morning March 18, more than 700 district employees participated in the festivities in the district office in Oakland.

Iran has been celebrating New Year's in springtime for more than a thousand years.

The date marks two historic events: the first Iranian dynasty, which dates back 2,562 years; and the journey by the Islamic Prophet Muhammed, who 1,382 years ago moved from his hometown of Mecca to the community of Medina.



District 4's Iranian New Year celebration included the Traditional New Year's Table (Haft Seen Table).

Either way, Iranians observe the date as Norooz, the traditional beginning of the Iranian New Year that coincides with the beginning of spring. In addition to Iran, people in the region with ties to the ancient Persian Empire, including Afghanistan, celebrate this event.

This year's observance was two days early. As many know, spring officially starts on March 20 or 21 every year. It is also the day on which all Iranians, regardless of their religion, celebrate the start of the New Year. This year it began March 20, at 4:59:45 p.m.

More than 200 Iranian-Americans in District 4 began celebrating the traditional ceremonies a few years back, and now it has become a familiar event. Coworkers were invited to attend the event during a morning break and to share a cup of coffee, tea, and some sweets.

The observance provided an excellent opportunity to talk about the diversity in Caltrans, to know each other and to network. A flyer available to attendees explained the reason and backgrounds for the gathering.

So, happy Iranian New Year to all!

Traffic Forecasts Aid Motorists Hitting the Road for Busy Holiday Weekends

With Memorial Day, the unofficial start of summer, on the horizon, millions of Californians are busy preparing for a long weekend of relaxation to take advantage of the multiple recreational opportunities the Golden State offers.

As travelers are packing their vehicles, they can be sure of one thing: the roads will be crowded.

Thanks to a small unit nestled in the Caltrans Traffic Operations Division in Sacramento, travelers will have an idea of just how crowded it may be over Memorial Day and other heavily traveled holiday weekends before they embark.

"Our aim is to give the public an idea of what they might expect on the highways over the upcoming holiday weekend. It is information that they can use in making their travel plans that may save them some time or aggravation," said Joe Avis, Research Manager in the Division of Traffic Operations.

Caltrans began providing traffic forecasts for busy holiday weekends in 1995.

The forecast is based on traffic count data that the department collects monthly at 20 locations statewide. The locations are used by the department to gather monthly data on the number of vehicle-miles traveled. Caltrans is required to submit that information to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

Caltrans has been collecting and compiling traffic data since 1929. Since 1972, the department has used the information to produce the monthly data for the FHWA, the Average Annual Daily Traffic Report and a yearly report on truck travel. The information is used by the department's Traffic Safety Branch to identify and program safety projects and by the department's Project Development personnel as

the foundation for road improvements designed to ease traffic congestion.

The idea for providing a holiday traffic forecast evolved from the functions already being performed.

"We were already collecting the data. It was a matter of taking the information,

In fact, with one exception, the unit is routinely within 1 or 2 percent of the final traffic increase numbers for the holiday weekends.

The unit only calculates holiday travel for Memorial Day, Labor Day and Thanksgiving, the three heaviest travel holidays.

"These weekends are the only ones where the factors stay the same. You have three-day weekends and in the case of Thanksgiving a four-day weekend. Other holidays, like July 4, float around. Some years it is in the middle of the week and others it is tagged to a weekend. Because the holiday is not consistent, you don't have the historical basis on which to make a comparison," said Avis.

To forecast the expected holiday travel, Avis' staff compiles information on vehicle-miles traveled at the 20 locations over a regular weekend and then compares that to the previous year's holiday weekend. This year, for example, they have predicted that motorists will drive an additional 410 million

vehicle-miles over the Memorial Day weekend, representing an increase of more than 14.6 percent statewide over a normal weekend.

Avis said that the forecast represents travel across the state. "Travel on individual routes will vary. Routes taking travelers to tourist destinations will experience significant spikes in traffic, while on other normally heavily traveled routes, it will be smooth sailing," he said.

For example, traffic on Interstate 5 in southern Fresno County will be about 40 percent higher than over a normal weekend, while Highway 101 through Santa Rosa will be off by nearly 6 percent.



Joe Avis and his staff in the Division of Traffic Operations predict a 14 percent increase in traffic over the upcoming Memorial Day holiday weekend.

doing the math and coming up with a forecast," Avis said. "Providing the holiday traffic forecast is another example of the department's effort to be more responsive to our customers."

The traffic data compiled by Avis' office is accessible on the department's web page.

In making the holiday traffic forecast, Avis and his five-person staff of researchers are guided strictly by the numbers.

"We're not gazing into a crystal ball. Rather, we study the data and make a prediction based on historical trends in traffic growth," Avis explained. "I'd say we're as accurate as the weather forecasters," said Avis. "Our batting average is pretty good."

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Caltrans has not had a single fatality accident in the last 24 months.

That's because the number of collisions in highway work zones is dropping. In 2001, collisions declined by 16 percent, and were down another 9 percent last year.

The director also announced the expansion of the department's "Slow for the Cone Zone" public awareness campaign, which has been credited with helping to reduce the number of accidents in maintenance and construction work zones.

The campaign's message, which appears on billboards and is heard on radio, urges drivers to ease off the gas pedal when they see the distinctive orange cones that are intended to protect highway workers. Advertising had been limited to Northern California and parts of the Central Coast, but soon will be seen statewide.

As the audience stood silently in the leafy Capitol Park, Director Morales guided people's attention to an oak tree that employees planted last year as a living memorial to fallen workers.

"Our task is to keep in mind those who have lost their lives while improving our highways," said Morales. "As we walk past this living tree, as we go about our day-to-day tasks and our busy schedules, we can reflect and, in quiet ways, remember those who have died in service to us all - a routine thing like returning home each day."

Other speakers included Gary Hamby, Division Administrator for the Federal Highway Administration; and Tony Grasso with the Associated General Contractors.

"Commander" Bill Eveland, traffic reporter with Sacramento radio station KFBK, acted as Master of Ceremonies. And the Rev. Dr. Don J. Richardson, pastor of the First Baptist Church in North Sacramento, offered opening and closing prayers.

The memorial also included an appearance by the Caltrans District 3 Honor Guard. Members include Bob Pence, Paul Inman, Lori Phillips, Shelly Piscitelli, Stan Luke, Paul Featherstone, Shirly Pereira, Byron Pierce, Joe Simas and John Wells.

Holiday Traffic*cont. from page 8*

"In addition to the raw numbers, we also try to consider other factors that may impact travel. Over the past 30 years the number of vehicle-miles traveled has been directly impacted by the economy. If economic times are robust, vehicle-miles traveled are up and conversely when the economy is sluggish, the growth in total vehicles-miles traveled is much less," said Avis.

The toughest prediction, according to Avis, was the Thanksgiving weekend in 2001, two months after the September 11th tragedy.

"We really didn't have a good handle on what we might expect. We had the data that in a normal year would have been a solid basis on which to forecast expected travel. In the wake of September 11th, we expected there would be some drop-off in travel, but no one could really say how much," said Avis.

In fact, traffic that weekend increased about 5 percent, about half of what would have been expected without the impact of September 11th.

The forecast focuses on 14 routes: Interstate 5, Highway 101, Interstate 10, Interstate 15, Highway 17, Highway 70, Highway 86, Highway 91, Highway 99, Highway 299, Interstate 110, Highway 120, Highway 198 and Highway 395. The counting stations represent a mix of all highway types in the state such as rural, urban, freeways and conventional highways.

For anyone thinking of hitting the highways over a long holiday weekend, Avis offers the following advice. "Allow plenty of time for your trip, drive cautiously and have a great time."

Exams Schedule**The Caltrans Examination Office anticipates that the following examination bulletins will have a final filing date in May/June:**

Associate Management Auditor
Equipment Materiel Coordinator
Janitor Supervisor II
Senior Engineering Geologist
Senior Fiscal System Analyst,
CT (Supervisor)

The following examinations allow for continuous filing:

Caltrans Electrical Technician
Caltrans Electrician I
Caltrans Electrician II
Caltrans Heavy Equipment Mechanic
Deputy Attorney III & IV, Caltrans
Transportation Surveyor, Caltrans
Transportation Surveyor,
Party Chief, Caltrans

The following examinations allow for continuous filing on the Internet:

Senior Environmental Planner
Senior Right of Way Agent
Senior Transportation Engineer, Caltrans
Transportation Engineer (Civil)
Transportation Engineer (Electrical)

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MSDP Examinations.

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